

DIVINE STRENGTHENING

By Judson Cornwall

“Your God has commanded your strength; strengthen, O God, what You have done for us” (Ps 68:28).

God had led His people into the Promised Land. Israel had settled down, and was learning how to rule and govern herself among the nations. She was preparing to become a world power.

King David, however, was uneasy in his spirit. Was the little nation of Israel really ready to stand up to the enemy forces around her?

ONLY GOD CAN PROTECT AND PROMOTE WHAT HE HAS BEGUN

David realized that it was not through their strength that they possessed the land. It was a mighty work of God. David also knew that only the Lord can protect and promote that which He has begun. “Show forth **Your** strength on our behalf, O God!”

When we march with God in the wilderness, we must totally look to Him to provide food, water, and shelter from the heat and cold. He alone can direct and protect us through the many dangers on every side. There is no place for pride on our part; **we must completely depend upon God** to bring us safely into the Promised Land.

Once we have arrived, however, our attitude can change. It is easy to forget God’s part in our success. We begin to think that the gains we have made were due to our own strength and wisdom. We tend to feel safe and sufficient in ourselves. How sad this is. God’s blessings should make us grateful to Him rather than forgetful of Him.

We must always remember that only *“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3).*

We can enter and occupy a new realm only by the power of God. He alone can complete what He has begun. How quickly Christian fellowships and organizations forget this. As their programs grow and develop, they rely more and more upon their own abilities, and less upon God. In time, God's wisdom and power are replaced by man's reason and ability. There may be an outward form of godliness, but the true power of God has long since departed (2Tim 3:5).

We all need to remember that **who we are and where we are in God is completely a work of His grace**. If we remove the presence and power of the Lord Jesus from the scene of our religious efforts, the whole picture will fade away. In the eyes of God, there will be nothing left worth looking at.

Jesus said there will be a day when many who thought they were doing great things in the name of the Lord will be disappointed. To their sad surprise, God will declare that He never knew them. Their earthly work was both unseen and unknown in Heaven. What man achieves through his own pride and power will have no heavenly reward (Matt 7:21-23).

THE GOD OF STRENGTH

We are expected to grow in Christ and become strong in the Lord. However, we will never come to a place where we no longer need His presence or power. We will always be dependent upon Him, *“for in Him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). This is a spiritual truth which is set forth by God Himself. He knows we can neither gain nor sustain – get or keep – our divine possessions apart from His power. Therefore, He not only brings us into our Promised Land, but remains with us to strengthen our stand.

David states this truth clearly with these words: *“Your God has commanded your strength. . .”* (Ps 68:28). It is your God Who gives the command of strength. It does not come from the mind of man; it comes from God – almighty God! He is called here by His Hebrew name, ***Elohim***.

In Psalm 27:1 David declares: *“. . . the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?”* And in Psalm 29:11: *“The Lord will give strength to His people. . .”* Over and over again, the Bible declares that **God alone is the source of our strength**.

THE GOD OF POWER AS PICTURED BY THE PSALMIST

It is interesting to note that in Psalm 68, David first pictures the “God of strength” before he presents the “strength of God”. God is revealed as:

- Our Father** – Psalm 68:5-6
- Our Leader** – Psalm 68:7-10
- Our Commander** – Psalm 68:11-14
- Our Abode** – Psalm 68:15-18
- Our Sustainer** – Psalm 68:19-20
- Our Chastener** – Psalm 68:21
- Our Avenger** – Psalm 68:22-23
- Our King** – Psalm 68:24-26
- Our Strength** – Psalm 68:27-28

The Bible reveals God as a Father bringing His children into security, equity, unity and liberty. We see Him guide and provide for His people in their march through the wilderness. We watch in great wonder as He wars against His enemies by the great power of His Word. We behold His presence as He graciously dwells among His people. We see Him **(in love)** chasten, forgive and redirect His wayward family again and again. We are caught up in holy wonder as we see Him in His power, glory and royal majesty: And it is **this** God – this very same God – Who commands our strength. This is the Lord God Almighty!

GOD AND HIS STRENGTH CANNOT BE SEPARATED

“Your God has commanded your strength. . .” Truly, the strength of God cannot be separated from the God of strength. God’s power is not present apart from His Person. Standing in the holy place of God’s glory within the Tabernacle, David cries out:

“Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!” (Ps 68:34-35).

It is in the sanctuary or sacred place that God shows His strength and power. While we worship God in our weakness, He works His strength into our being. In worship, we become linked with His life in a powerful way. The Apostle Paul puts this truth in these words: *“I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me”* (Phil 4:13). It is interesting to note that Paul does not claim that the power of Christ is apart from the Person of Christ. Rather, he says it is *“through Christ”* that he finds strength. Paul’s power came from his relationship with the Lord.

Jesus tried to make this truth very clear to His disciples: *“Without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). He is the Vine; we are the branches. If we are not joined to the Vine, we are cut off from His life-giving flow of power. Instead of producing fruit, we will wither and die. Only as we are linked to His life in Christ Jesus, can God “command our strength.”

GOD COMMANDS OUR STRENGTH

“Your God has commanded your strength...” (Ps 68:28). This is not a reference to our strength; it is a reference to God’s strength. Apart from Him, we have no strength to command. Before meeting Jesus, we had no spiritual life and no spiritual strength. Therefore, if we look to any other source than the Lord for our life-power, we will be disappointed.

As sinners, we needed the power of God to save us from our sins. As Christians, we still need the power of God in order to grow in grace, and battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. It is impossible to begin in the spirit and go on in the flesh. We cannot rely upon our will-power, reason or emotions to live a life of triumph in Christ. If we try to draw upon our own strength, we will succeed only in wearing ourselves out. We cannot draw water from a well that is dry!

God knows us better than we know ourselves. He will never command us to exercise power we do not possess. David wrote, *“For He knows our frame [how we are made]; He remembers that we are dust”* (Ps 103:14).

COMMAND: ITS FOURFOLD MEANING

When God “commands” our strength, He is not asking us to draw upon our own resources. Rather, He is offering us the power of His presence. The Hebrew word for “command” is ***tsavah***. It has at least four meanings:

1. To send a messenger
2. To appoint
3. To give charge
4. To put in order

Each of these thoughts has a slightly different meaning. All reveal a picture of God giving to us of His strength. God has “appointed” or set forth His strength for us in a special and personal way. He has “charged” or commanded that divine power be ready for our every need. It has been divinely “ordered” and arranged in Heaven for our benefit here on earth. We do not have to beg for something that God has already provided. Paul was taught this truth by the Lord Himself during a time of great personal need. Jesus simply said, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*” (2Cor 12:9).

ANGELS: MINISTERS OF DIVINE STRENGTH

God also appoints or sends forth His special “messengers” to minister divine strength. “*Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*” (Heb 1:14; see also Psalm 104:4). Beginning with the story of Jacob’s ladder (Gen 28:10-12), the role of angels is found all throughout Scripture. They are seen under God’s orders to minister to man in his time of need and weakness.

Even Jesus in His manhood was helped by the holy angels of Heaven. We are told of His great agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; we read in Luke 22:44 that He sweat “*great drops of blood*”. He was left weak and weary, and the terrible ordeal of the cross was only a few hours away. At that moment, God the Father “commanded strength” for His own Son. And that strength was provided by an angel: “*An angel appeared to Him from Heaven, strengthening Him*” (Luke 22:43).

In His humanity, Jesus used only the resources that were available to man. He did not rely upon the power or authority of His deity. Therefore, it should not seem unusual for God to send angels to strengthen us in our time of need as well.

THE STRENGTH OF GOD

“Your God has commanded your strength” (Ps 68:28). Here the Hebrew word for “strength” is **owz**. Its main meaning is “strength”, but it includes the ideas of might, power, boldness and loudness. The complete thought for this verse, therefore, might read as follows: Your God has commanded your strength, power, might and boldness!

DIVINE STRENGTH FROM GOD’S WORD

Sometimes divine strength comes through angelic action, as we have seen. Even so, the source of that strength is always in the authority of God’s Word. God has entered into a legal agreement with us. He has included us in His will. He did this when He set forth the New Testament. A “testament” is a **will**. It is a legal means by which one person passes on his earthly goods to others after he dies. Therefore, he can be sure that “his will” concerning the giving of his goods after his death will be enforced by law.

The Scriptures explain what this means for us in our relationship with God: *“For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives”* (Heb 9:17).

“Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant [testament] in My blood, which is shed for you’ ” (Luke 22:20).

In effect, Jesus is saying that His death shall release to the believer all that He has promised him while He was on earth. When this will (testament) goes into force after His death and resurrection, *“the works that I do he [the believer] will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father”* (John 14:12).

There is no greater power available to any of us than this. The strength of His “will” as set forth in His Word goes far beyond what we can understand. When Jesus died on the cross, God’s will for us was put into full force. Moreover, He will personally back up His Word with the power of His might. It is not a matter of how we think or feel, but Who He is and what He has said. The strong Word of the Lord is the sure basis for our faith. *“...for You have magnified Your word above all Your name”* (Ps 138:2).

DIVINE BOLDNESS FOR SERVICE

God's call and God's power upon our lives brings great boldness for Christian service. As we recall, the Hebrew word **owz** refers to **boldness** as well as strength. The coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives can give boldness to even timid or shy people.

Peter denied his Lord before a little maiden just before Jesus was crucified. After Pentecost, however, he spoke with great boldness to the very people who had put Jesus to death. Peter preached and served without fear. When put in prison under penalty of death, he peacefully fell asleep. After his release by an angel, he went right on openly preaching the Gospel. That is divine boldness!

It is God's will that we have boldness to face people – and even to face the devil. His perfect will, however, is that we have boldness to come into His very presence. The Scriptures plainly say that we can come boldly before God's throne because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus:

“Christ Jesus our Lord, in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Eph 3:12).

*“Let us therefore come **boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).*

Yes, God has commanded the strength of boldness – boldness to come into His very presence. Such a privilege should bring real strength to our lives. We have the same right to come to our heavenly Father as does Jesus Himself. We are beloved children in His family. This gives us divine authority and boldness when we face the evil forces of the world system. We are not lonely, helpless orphans. We are royal sons and daughters on a divine mission for our heavenly Father. He has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit to back us up.

“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ ” (Heb 13:5,6).

DIVINE MIGHT AND POWER ALWAYS AVAILABLE

The Hebrew word **owz** can also mean “might”. God has commanded His “might” to those who follow Him. The Israelites found this to be very true in their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

The Apostle Paul places great importance upon God's might in his prayers for the churches at Ephesus and Colossae:

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:14,16).

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power” (Col 1:9,11).

In other words, Paul is saying that all the glorious strength, might and power of Heaven is available to us. We may feel very weak and feeble at times, but we have the power and authority of all Heaven behind us. This means the might of God's name, the might of God's Word, the might of God's Spirit, the might of God's Son, the might of God's angels, and the might of God's Church. It is all ours to be used in doing His will and work here on earth. How very sad it is, therefore, to hear people say, “I am trying to serve God in my own weak and feeble way!”

It is meekness and trust, **not** weakness and fear, that God wants in our lives. It is His power, not our efforts, that will enable us to do His will. He will never ask us to do something that we cannot do by His might and wisdom. He will always give us both the power and the authority to do His will and complete His calling for our lives.

We see this in the life of Jesus, when He called His disciples together and sent them forth with “*power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases*” (Luke 9:1). He gave them both “**power**” (ability) and “**authority**” (legal right) to carry out His command. In the same way, whenever God commands our service, He will also command our strength!

When we truly need God's might, He will send it to us by way of:

an angelic messenger
a ministry of His Spirit
a revelation from His Word
a member of His Church

We will always receive all that we need, just when we need it. God's might is always available!

GOD APPLIES HIS DIVINE STRENGTH IN FOUR WAYS

Divine strength can be applied in several different ways. The Hebrew word **owz** refers to four different applications: "force", "security", "majesty" and "praise".

God gives us the spiritual "force" that we need to strengthen our service for Him. It is through the authority of His Word and the power of His Spirit that we can force the enemy to flee. When we submit to and come under God's authority, His authority comes upon us. The devil cannot stand up to the spiritual force with which we then resist him, and quickly flees (see James 4:7).

God also strengthens us with divine "security". Peter puts it this way:

"...who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1Pet 1:5).

Our faith and confidence – our safety and security – are in the strength of Almighty God. We have been cleansed, called and sent by God. We will also be safely and securely kept by God until that day. In this light, listen to these encouraging words which Paul writes to Timothy, his "dear son" in the Lord: *"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2Tim 1:12).*

The Hebrew word **owz** also refers to the strength we receive by sharing in God's "majesty and praise". We are as *"kings and priests to His God and Father" (Rev 1:6)*. *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-6)*. Yes, we sit with Him in heavenly places. We march with Him in victory after spiritual battles have been won. In this way, He actually allows us to share in His glory!

The wife of a president or a king shares in his majesty and praise when she is by his side. In the same way we, who are called "the Bride of Christ", share in

the glory of our heavenly Bridegroom. All honor and praise belong to Him as the “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (see Revelation 19:16). On our own and by ourselves, we are not worthy of such honor or praise. However, because we belong to Him – as a bride belongs to her husband – we will rightfully share in His honor. All Heaven will forever ring with His praises. And we will be there – by His side – sharing with Him the glory, honor and majesty of Almighty God! “*Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary*” (Ps 96:6).

GOD’S STRENGTH:

Solid As Steel

“**Strengthen**, O God, what You have done for us” (Ps 68:28).

In the first part of this verse (“*Your God has commanded your **strength***”), David used the Hebrew word **owz** for “strength”. In this part of the verse, he uses the Hebrew word **azaz** for “strengthen”. **Azaz** means “make strong” or “harden”. Something that is **hardened** is **solid** and **firm**. If it is solid enough and firm enough, it will not crumble under pressure; nothing will be able to move it from its place. It will be **steadfast** – firmly established.

“**Strengthen . . . what You have done for us**”: David was asking God to **make solid, firm and steadfast** what He had done for them.

What does this mean for us?

It means that God wants to accomplish something in and through our lives that is **firmly established**, solid and steel, strong enough to last forever.

Standing Firm

I have seen so much of God’s work be hindered and even fall during times of trial and testing. It wasn’t strong enough to stand up under pressure. Yet God wants to do a strong, solid work in our lives that will enable us to **stand firm** in our hour of temptation.

God’s strength is something like concrete when it is first poured. It must “solidify” before it is firm and strong enough to be of use. This was Paul’s desire for the Christians in Corinth: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be*

steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1Cor 15:58).

God wants to so solidify His work in our lives that we will stay strong in our faith and service to Him. This was also the great desire in David’s heart for his own life and the lives of his people. Therefore, he prays: “**Strengthen [make solid, firm and steadfast] what You have done for us!**”

Divine Prevailing Power

We have seen that the Hebrew word **azaz** in Psalm 68 means “strengthen” or “solidify”. It has another meaning, however, that brings further insight to this verse in David’s Psalm. **Azaz** also means “to prevail”. “Prevail, O God...” is David’s plea. We find the same idea in these words of Jesus: “*And on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades [hell] shall not prevail against it*” (Matt 16:18). Jesus is saying, in fact, that **it is the Church**, rather than hell, which will prevail!

The word “prevail” means “win one’s way by force of words or action”. We gain our goals by overcoming all that would oppose us. Sometimes it seems that hell is prevailing against the Church. However, God assures us that in the end the Church will surely win. **Through the strength which God has commanded**, we shall overcome!

We can never say we failed because God’s strength was not sufficient or available. It is always there for us, and it is always enough. We can only say we failed in faith to receive that which God had already given.

Paul expected God’s power to prevail in the life of His people: “*Being confident of this very thing, that He Who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil 1:6).

God never begins a work which He will not complete. He always backs up His work by the prevailing power of His Word. “**Prevail, O God, in what You have done for us!**”

GOD STRENGTHENS HIS WORK, NOT OURS

The strengthening work which we have studied is totally related to God’s work – not ours. We see this in David’s own words, “**Strengthen then . . . what You have done for us**” (Ps 68:28).

So many times we beg and plead for God to strengthen something that He never began in the first place. Somehow we feel that if we can just touch God in prayer, He will strengthen anything that relates to **our** work for Him. We sit for hours making our plans for God, and then in the end ask for His blessing.

Actually, **we only have a right to ask God to strengthen that work which He has begun – and desires to carry on.** God is not interested in the work of our hands, or the plans of our minds, or the pride of our hearts. He has promised only to strengthen what **He** is doing through us!

How important it is, then, to find out what God is doing, and allow Him to do it through us. Only as we get involved in God's work can we expect Him to be strong on our behalf. As we seek His face to do His will, He will readily supply us with the power and wisdom we need. There is safety and strength in the purpose and plans of God. Our faith will be firm when we know we are in His will. Only then can we resist the enemy and know we will prevail.

TRIUMPHANT HOPE

It is the God of all strength Who brings His Church to full growth and maturity. He alone is the Source of Her life during Her work and witness here on earth. He has promised to guard and to keep everything He has done in, with and through the Church. He has chosen Her as a royal Bride for His Son.

And the Bride, together with Her Lord and Master Jesus Christ, will reign with Him forever!

*“The saints of the Most High shall receive the Kingdom, and **possess the Kingdom forever...**”*(Dan 7:18).

*“If we endure, we shall also **reign with Him...**”* (2Tim 2:12).

*“To Him Who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and **has made us kings and priests to His God and Father...**”* (Rev 1:5,6).

*“To him who overcomes I will grant **to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne**”* (Rev. 3:21).

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree

*yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. **And they shall reign forever and ever**" (Rev 22:1-5).*

To reign with Him forever... may God strengthen you with this triumphant hope, solidly grounded in His firm and steadfast Word.

